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PO Box 3300, South Brisbane 4101, Australia  
Phone 06 7 3840 7555  
Fax 06 7 3846 1226  
Email [qmlib@qm.qld.gov.au](mailto:qmlib@qm.qld.gov.au)  
Website [www.qm.qld.gov.au](http://www.qm.qld.gov.au)

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## CHAPTER 3

### THE LAST BATTLE OF MUA: ELEVEN TEXTS

ANNA SHNUKAL

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Of all the battles fought by the people of Mua (Banks Island), the most significant was the 'last battle of Mua.' Said to have taken place shortly before the placement of Christian missionaries on Mua in 1872, it marked the end of the era of revenge killings and the beginning of a new, peaceful, 'civilised' era. The battle also provides a confirmation, context and explanation for some of the earliest recorded observations of Mua: its reduced population, fear of strangers and abandonment of coastal villages. This chapter reproduces 11 texts of the battle, collected between 1898 and 2002, and provides evidence that the battle took place not in 1863, as usually claimed, but in 1870. □ *Italgai, Mualgal, Torres Strait history, Mua (Banks Island).*

*Anna Shnukal, 75 Stanley Terrace, Taringa, Queensland 4068, Australia; received 24 July 2006.*

Of the numerous battles fought by the people of Mua, the most significant was the final 'massacre of the Muans', the culmination of generations of enmity among the peoples of Mua, Mabayag and Badu. This battle, which took place not long before the arrival of Christianity, marked the end of the cycle of revenge killings which characterised life in pre-contact Torres Strait and the Islanders' acceptance of Christianity and 'civilisation.'

The battle is also historically important in that it provides a confirmation, context and explanation for some of the earliest recorded observations of Mua. European visitors in the 1840s reported that Mua had a large population; those who began to arrive in greater numbers from the early 1870s, noted the abandonment of Mua's coastal villages, the smaller than expected population for such a large island and the fear of outsiders. It is generally argued that the depopulation of the islands (on Mua as elsewhere) was caused by the depredations of the shellers and the spread of disease, chiefly the measles epidemic of 1875. While not downplaying the abuses perpetrated by the new arrivals, who raided island gardens, seized women and men for the bêche-de-mer boats, given the protection afforded by the size of Mua, its scattered population and its wooded and hilly interior, it is unarguable that endemic retaliatory warfare also played a significant role in the Muans' psychological fragility, their move into the interior and their eventual willingness to accept the protection of Christian missionaries from late 1872.

The importance of the final battle has ensured that it continues to be recounted by the people of Mua, Mabayag and Badu, each retelling providing a unique perspective and context. The eleven versions provided here were collected between 1898 and 2002 and offer a range of different viewpoints and a wealth of narrative and incidental detail. A collection of such versions serves two purposes: it provides access to documentary sources which otherwise may be difficult to access; and it allows the researcher to date certain pre-contact events in Torres Strait history more accurately, using internal narrative evidence, relevant fragments of external documentary evidence and local knowledge. Evidence will be adduced that the battle did not occur in 1863, as has generally been assumed, but probably in August 1870.

#### A FACTUAL EVENT?

Despite there being no contemporary first-hand accounts of the battle, the available hearsay evidence convinced many researchers of the historical basis for the events first set down about a generation after their occurrence, beginning with Wilkin and Haddon from the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits. I shall refer to these as 'stories' (accounts of recent important events), following Lawrence's (1994: 290) distinction between stories and legends (non-historical stories handed down through the generations but popularly recognised as having some historical character).<sup>1</sup> The third category,

not relevant here, is myth (imaginative, symbolic stories not to be taken literally but revelatory of a culture's deepest values). Thus, technically speaking, the historian Singe (1989: 169) is correct in pointing out that we have no proof that the massacre occurred; nevertheless, there is sufficient convergence in the accounts from Mua, Mabuyag and Badu for us to accept the factual core of the events narrated, even when some of the accreted details may be questioned. Of the 'tales of the war-path' recorded by Wilkin on Mabuyag in 1898, which include this final battle, Wilkin (1904: 308) writes that 'we may regard them as being as accurate as most historical records which are narrated by the conquering side.'

The pre-contact cycle of *peibaik* (retaliatory) killings is well attested. Wilkin (1904: 298) defines blood feuds or reprisal wars as those 'in which no quarter would be granted, and the stronger party would crush the weaker and probably either capture the women or kill them and the children.' Numerous raids on each other by Mua, Mabuyag (Mabuiag), Naghir (Nagi) and Badu, sometimes in alliance, left the people exhausted and demoralised until the boys grew to manhood and could reactivate the cycle (see Fig. 1 and the Figures in Manas et al. ('Introduction to Gelam's Homeland' chapter, this volume) for locations of the places mentioned in this paper). The numbers of warriors who could be mobilised on the above islands waxed and waned.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we have glimpses of Mua as a strong nation, too strong to be challenged by the Kaurareg in the 1840s, yet, a generation later, depleted and fearful (Chester, 1871). At each encounter, the small bands regularly lost at least half a dozen members, clubbed to death and beheaded by their enemies. A Mabuyag man told Wilkin (1904: 318), perhaps exaggeratedly, that head-hunting expeditions to Mua were 'like breakfast,' i.e. part of the daily routine.

Mua is one of the largest islands of the strait and was protected from marauders by its hills, swamps and rough terrain, its elaborate system of lookouts and guards who warned of intruders by sounding the *bu*-shell, and its rocky overhangs, hidden from outside view, into which the women and children fled for safety. Its people lived in small extended family groups in many semi-permanent coastal and inland camps and any attack was a warning to others to flee. Nonetheless, by the turn of the twentieth century, its former population, said once to have been the equal of its nearest neighbours, had dwindled to about a

quarter, no more than 40 or 50 (Douglas, 1900: 34). Such a devastating loss indicates either one or a series of devastating causal events – in Torres Strait these were generally massacre, illness or drought. Yet, despite a series of deadly illnesses brought by outsiders from the 1860s, the isolation of the villages militated against their spread to areas outside more crowded pearling or *bêche-de-mer* centres. Pearling began in Mua Pass from the early 1870s but there is no suggestion that illness or drought caused Muan depopulation, as on some other islands. Rather, the reason given by the Muans themselves was invariably the depredations of Mabuyag and Badu. The local Government Resident wrote that 'a warlike tribe famous in the old times fought the Moa people, and cut them up to such an extent that they never recovered' (Douglas, 1900: 34).

#### VERSIONS AND VERACITY

Countless oral versions of the massacre have been told but we cannot access them except by proxy and without their performative and instructional aspects. The 11 which appear in this chapter were all written down in English by Europeans either directly from stories narrated by elderly Islanders with rights to tell the story or inspired by them: Namai from Mua and his mother were said to be the only survivors; Kokoa from Badu was a participant in the battle; Algida (Alligator) from Badu was, like Namai, a child at the time; Peter from Mabuyag was the grandson of Bainu, a participant in an earlier fight. Despite the largely hearsay nature of the accounts, younger narrators would have heard the story many times from the actual participants as they were growing up.

The versions reproduced here were written down between 1898 and 2002 and range in length from a paragraph to several pages. Read in sequence, they offer increasingly less ethnographic information. The first, most elaborate version was recorded by Wilkin from Peter of Mabuyag, grandson of a participant, Bainu, a generation after the events it narrates. It is told from a Mabuyag perspective and provides a wealth of incidental detail found only in Version IV, which appears to be a somewhat sanitised and shortened version. The versions in date order with their narrator (where known) and recorder are:

Version I: Peter of Mabuyag 1898 (Wilkin, 1904)

Version II: Algida of Badu 1915 (Burnett, 1962)

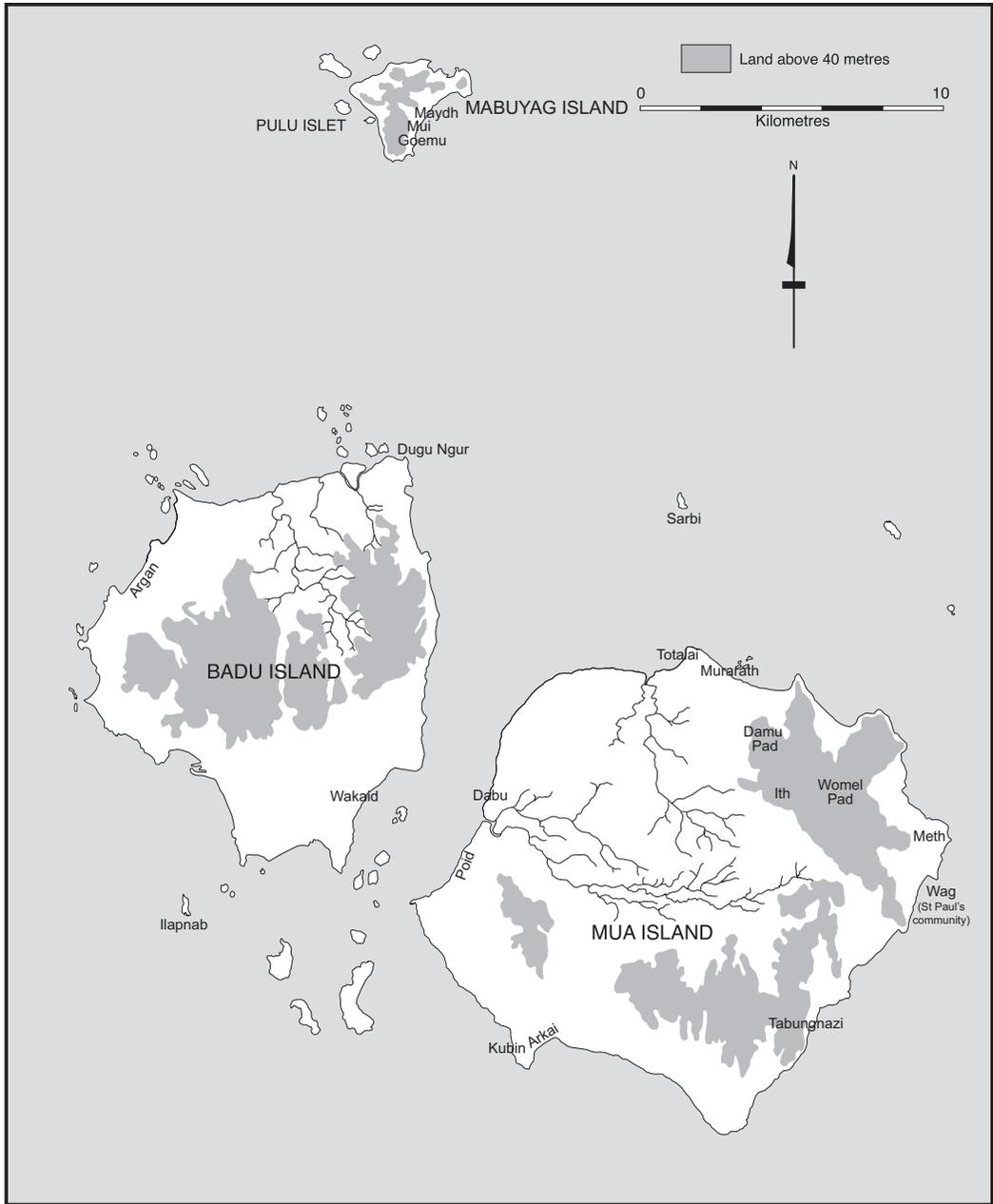


FIG. 1. Map of Mua, Badu and Mabuyag, showing the locations of places named in this paper.

Version III: Namai of Mua 1922 (Davies, 1922b)  
 Version IV: Peter of Mabusyag 1898 (Queensland Home Secretary's Department, 1928)  
 Version V: Namai of Mua and Kokoa of Badu 1932 (Murphy, 1966)  
 Version VI: Unknown, possibly Namai c.1934 (Patterson, 1938)  
 Version VII: Unknown, possibly Patterson 1938 (Edwards, 1997)  
 Version VIII: Unknown, possibly Patterson 1938 (Singe, 1989)  
 Version IX: Idriess (1947)  
 Version X: Manase Bani of Mabusyag 1967 (Lawrie, 1970)  
 Version XI: Isaac Charlie of Badu 2002 (Shnukal, 2002)

That there are differences in the versions does not detract from the 'truth' of the core events. Indeed, a single received version would be far more suspicious: the psychology of memory is such that 'people take away different snatches of the same event' (Belfield, 2005: 184). The differences add a range of perspectives and, paradoxically, reinforce the factuality of the story and sequence of events; they can be reconciled by assessing the knowledge of the narrators and their relationship with the participants, the time of recording and the differing points of view. I have simply added some commentary in endnotes to identify individuals or specify some detail. On a few occasions I have inserted a language term or its translation. Some

TABLE 1. Individuals named in this chapter. I cannot fully vouch for this list, given the widespread practice of name alteration and exchange, name duplication and absence of dates. The forward slash indicates alternate names; the comma indicates different individuals. Sources: Eseli (1998), Rivers' genealogical tables in Haddon, 1904.

Name	Island	Clan	Parents	Spouse(s)
Algida/Paipai	Badu	Dugong	Getawan & Wakapatai	Magidamai, Gawada, Nazir
Anu/Namai	Mua		Gema & Athub	Poid, Gitara, Aidabu
Apus	Mua			
Bagari/Iburu	Mabusyag	Dugong	Maida & Dibidibi	Momag
Bainu/Kabisan	Mabusyag	Shark	Konewe & Dadim/Poid	Salmui
Ganaia	Mabusyag	Dugong	Newa & Kawangai	Neru
Gib	Mabusyag	Dugong	Ngaragi & Dagum	Koisugu, Talim, Waikai, Dau, Kuda
Gibara	Mabusyag	Dugong	Tabuai & Dariki	Malel
Gizu/Kanai	Mabusyag	Shark	Baia & Aipai	Wamad, Mudulpua, Talim, Iwai/Panau
Guni-Maira	Mabusyag	Dugong	Tabuai & Dariki	Ulum
Jacob Abednego	Mua (St Paul's)		Billy & Rachel Rotumah	Annie (Eroa) Savika
Kodau	Mua		Apus & Unknown	Muyam
Kokoa	Badu	Dugong	Newa & Kawangai	Murap/Dadakupai, Numagu
Maiti	Mua		Apus & Unknown	
Manase Bani	Mabusyag	Crocodile	Bani & Kalengo Mabua	Panau, Irad
Muyam	Mua		Unknown	Kodau
Parsau/Moigub	Mabusyag	Shark	Gemini & Gebi	Pipit
Pedia	Mabusyag	Dugong	Ngaragi & Dagum	Umi, Baiti, Dimur, Dakei
Peter/Papi	Mabusyag	Shark	Ausa & Wiwai	Baibai/Magena, Adakau
Uria	Badu	Crocodile	Magasu & Bia	Gisu, Ad
Waba/Bamaga	Mabusyag	Snake	Dawiri & Yakoma	Akabu
Waiaba	Mabusyag	Crocodile	Kadi & Kaisu	Saku, Yamai, Asi
Waipat	Mabusyag	Crocodile	Dibi & Kakup	Wabizu
Wanekai/Mogai	Mabusyag	Dugong	Pedia & Dakei	Pogodua
Yati	Mabusyag	Snake	Pitu & Asuro	Kugut, Bubu

of the protagonists are recorded in Rivers' genealogies in Haddon (1904) and in official vital registration data, attesting not only to their existence but also supporting a more plausible date for the massacre. As Wilkin (1904: 308) notes, the men of the original raiding party 'would probably have been alive at the same time; in several cases they are own brothers or near relations.' Table 1 is an alphabetical list of individuals named in this chapter and, where known, their clan and closest kin.

Table 1 allows us to trace some connections. A majority of the Mabuyag warriors belonged to the Dugong and Crocodile clans and were descended from Peid, the leader of the Panai people of Mabuyag. There were three sets of brothers: Pedia and Gib (not father and son); Gibara and Guni-Maira; Ganaia and Kokoa. Wanekai, Pedia's son, was Gib's nephew and Ganaia was Waipat's nephew; Peter, who told the story to Wilkin, was Bainu's grandson; Algida, who told the story to Mrs Burnett, was Iburu's grandson.

#### SUMMARY OF THE BATTLE

A brief summary of the core events, based upon these versions, is as follows. Mua, Mabuyag and Badu had for generations been engaged in reciprocal head-hunting raids, exhausting their populations for a while but without either side gaining a decisive advantage. In the north-west season, the Torres Strait 'hungry time', a party of young men from Mabuyag was discovered raiding a garden near Murarath on Mua and at least three were killed. There was indecision about whether to retaliate, since the Muans were strong adversaries and the Mabuyag men had transgressed societal norms in raiding the gardens. However, a group of Mabuyag warriors made a retaliatory attack, during which they fired the dwellings and gardens of Ith (the word *ith* refers to the knob on a crocodile's head) and warned of further vengeance. Mabuyag then formed an alliance with a group of Badu warriors and landed at uninhabited Dabu, from where they launched a second attack, killing the women and children of two inland camps. Soon afterwards Badu divers salvaged several cases of tobacco and a number of boxes of new cutlasses from a sunken ship nearby and, still smarting over the deaths of Mabuyag relatives at Muan hands, they plotted to use this unexpected booty to even the score. Believing that the Mabuyag men, supported by the power of Kuyam, would

massacre a great number, and knowing the advantage the cutlasses would give them, the Badu people made sure that their relatives and friends were removed to Badu out of harm's way. They then sent a canoe bearing unarmed warriors to Mua with a 'peace gift', a case of tobacco. The people of Mua were told that if they assembled, unarmed, on the beach at Adam next morning, more tobacco would be brought across for them. That evening, the Mabuyag warriors moved into position in the mangroves near Adam to block off any escape and early next morning two canoe loads of Badu warriors landed with the tobacco. They were apparently unarmed and carried only their rolled sitting mats but, unknown to the Mualgal, each warrior had hidden in his mat one of the new cutlasses salvaged from the wreck. At a given signal, the Badu men took out the cutlasses and, joined by the Mabuyag men who blocked any escape, began to slaughter all the people on the beach. Almost none escaped. Shortly afterwards the LMS placed two missionaries at Totalai and the era of revenge killings ceased.

#### ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

A great deal of ethnographic information can be found in the incidental detail of Versions I and IV. By 'incidental detail', I do not intend to disparage its importance: on the contrary, it is this detail which fleshes out the meagre written record of pre-contact Muan society and I have mined it for chapter 2, this volume. Significant Torres Strait stories are not, in my experience, embellished with unnecessary detail. Detail is not used in the same way as in modern European literary fiction, but always has some culturally significant motive, even if this is not necessarily apparent to non-Islanders. Each public act of story telling is a performance but no detail is included *po nating* (for no reason). Every story has multiple purposes: apart from entertainment, the primary functions of story-telling include cultural transmission, social capital formation and moral instruction, tailored at a particular time and place for a particular audience. Skilled and subtle story tellers add detail as a way of particularising the story, making it their own, underlining their authority to tell the tale, linking the hearers to their ancestors, boasting of group victories won, commemorating great warriors and strengthening a sense of clan and family. Hearers take from the story different facts and impressions, viewed through the prism of their own prior experience and knowledge. It is

the detail of the different versions that best evokes the different aspects of the event – the participants, people, places and context.

### THE VERSIONS

I have made no substantive changes to the written texts, beyond omitting some descriptive details in Version I which do not bear directly or indirectly on the final battle. These include the passages of rejoicing by the Mabuyag men, details of their preparation for war, etc., which can be read in their entirety in Wilkin (1904: 308-316). Other minor changes were made to regularise the spelling, simplify the punctuation and modernise archaic expressions to make them more intelligible to the reader whose first language is not English. I have also made some additions in square brackets and at times substituted a more modern expression of the original Pidgin English, e.g., ‘stuck’ rather than ‘fast’ and ‘prepare’ rather than ‘make ready.’

VERSION I: PETER OF MABUYAG 1898 (WILKIN, 1904). The first of the three texts is the most authoritative and comprehensive and appears to be the model for Version IV. By far the most detailed account, it contextualises the events on Mua from a Mabuyag perspective and is particularly valuable as a product of both the narrator, a direct descendant of a battle participant, and the time at which it was recorded – during the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition’s visit to Mabuyag in September-October 1898, a generation after the events. Peter of Mabuyag, grandson of Bainu, who is named as the killer of an unnamed woman during a raid on Mua, told the story to the archaeologist, A. Wilkin, in Pacific Pidgin English. Wilkin translated this into a deliberately archaic English, probably to suggest parallels with similar stories of warfare and revenge in the Old Testament and Norse sagas. Unfortunately, Wilkin did not live to make final corrections.

A party of Mabuyag men took a canoe named *Wameran* to go fishing for turtle in the north-west season. The captain of this boat was called Gib. After they had been out a week their food was exhausted. ‘We been look turtle and dugong one week. Food belong us all he finish now.’ Owing to stress of weather they failed to make Mabuiag and had to land on Mua at Murarath. Gib, Pedia (his father, a *maidhalaig*),<sup>3</sup> Bagari (or Iburu), Waiaba, Yati, Gibara, Kole, Guni-Maira and Parsau went to plunder a garden for food; no one remaining by the boat. They went and

returned well loaded but were observed by a woman who reported to the men of Mua. Again they came, but this time the bush was alive with warriors, one of whom, Muyam, rose up and called to Waiaba ‘*Ni laka au? Laka au?*’ (Why did you come back?)<sup>4</sup> The Mabuiag men were taken completely by surprise. They sprang up but received a shower of spears. The old sorcerer Pedia was wounded with four or five, yet, because of his magic, he did not die but escaped to the canoe. Bagari (Iburu), Waiaba and Yati perished on the field. Gib covered the retreat with his bow and arrows keeping the enemy at bay until nearly all were exhausted. But one who had another bow and arrows had made good his retreat to the boat and Gib reproached him in his distress. But the Mua men had had enough – fortunately – and departed, for the canoe was almost stuck and they could hardly launch her into deep water. Parsau was missing and, though they waited, he did not come, so that all thought him dead. Thus they set the mat sails and eventually arrived at Mabuyag. Meanwhile Parsau hid in the bush and presently made good his retreat through the scrub and swam across to Badu. The pursuers were hot after him but could not swim like Parsau. Thus he told his tale to the men of Badu and stayed with them one night, receiving great kindness at their hands, for they put him safely ashore among his kinsmen of Mabuyag, being then, as they still are, the allies and relations of that island. The canoe had already arrived, so the Badu and Mabuyag men met and yarned together for they were distressed. Still they said, ‘Let us wait another month and the men of Mua will forget, so shall we attack them unawares [...]’

In the meantime the men of Mua had these events driven from their minds by others of even greater import, and indeed the warriors of Mabuyag too would have forgotten if it were not for those happenings. There lived at Mua at Damu Pad a sorcerer, Apus, whose fame reached from one side of the strait to the other. This *maidhalaig* had a son Maiti and a daughter named Kodau, who was married to Muyam. Now, though Kodau was a daughter to a sorcerer, she was subject to all the frailty of human nature, and Muyam had reason to suspect her fidelity. One day, therefore, when she went into the bush to dig yams and taro and sweet potatoes he followed her and hid close to the garden – he did this to test her. Taking a stone, he threw it softly in her direction and Kodau, seeing it, started and cried out, ‘Ha, what is this – surely a spirit’s handiwork?’ Again he threw a stone that lodged near her foot. This time she looked up and said, ‘Is that you Gaizu?’ – for Gaizu

was the younger brother of Muyam and she loved him. Then Muyam returned home in a rage and sat apart in the house preparing his great spear with the two prongs that he had from the mainland Aborigines - *dagulal* is the name for it in Mua – nor did he speak to Kodau when she came in and greeted him, for he was convinced that she had betrayed him. Thus it was that, as she stooped over the fire, preparing her husband's meal, the evil that was in him called out to kill her immediately, for he would surely lose his aim if he could see his wife's face. And Kodau died, pierced through the back, and all men cried aloud in the village, 'Muyam has slain the daughter of Apus!' 'The child of the sorcerer is dead.' So the tidings came to Apus as he brooded alone in his hut among the charms and he became like a wild man that does not know good from evil, just as he had often been before while dwelling among corpses and drinking what is forbidden – their oozing juices. A terrible vengeance he must take on Muyam, for he had provoked the man who knew all things. Many days the old man sat by his fire brooding – his glittering eyes buried in his breast like those of some cruel serpent, and the spirit of cunning entered into him and he planned how he might be avenged upon the man that slew and upon the man that mocked – for, surely, though no man is friend to a *maidhalaig* in trouble, he should be in fear of him all his days, going about his business discreetly and not foolishly. Apus took wood and fashioned many images of men, giving to each a name, and to the first the name of Muyam. For days he toiled, scraping with a piece of wreck-iron and shaping the *wauri* (effigies); then he tied them all on a long string and went into the depths of the bush where those plants grow that belong to sorcerers.

He made medicine of these plants and rubbed each figure with it from head to heel. Next Apus dug a hole to make an oven and heated stones with fire, then he wrapped the *wauri* in leaves and put the stones upon them and above all mats to keep in the heat and steam. Three times he put them in the oven and three times the images were cooked. This done, he tied them all to the tops of trees so that they swung in the wind this way and that – and the manner of their wringing was as the manner of men surrounded by foes when they look to run but cannot for the press of spears.

Thus Apus made the men of Mua weak and foolish and an easy prey to the warriors of Mabuyag. Then the old man thought about how to bring that vengeance quickly before the charm had lost its power, and as he thought,

he drew his right hand [menacingly] across his throat.

And as Apus performed his magic the men of Mabuig took counsel together, and some were for forgetting and some for fighting, but the latter prevailed, whether because they still cared for their dead and would see them avenged, or because the spell of Apus was upon them, I know not.

When the four clans of Mabuyag had agreed to fight, they went to the islet of Pulu, where lie the skulls of those they have slain and also the two war *augadh* of Kuyam<sup>5</sup> [...] [Having made their preparations] they set forth to Mua in their canoes. But as they came openly the people of Mua saw them when they were still far off and fled to the mountains, where they dwelt under great leaves – leaving their houses and gardens a prey to the invader. Then Mabuyag took vengeance and burnt all their houses and destroyed their gardens, but all Mua was afraid to fight because Apus had taken away their bravery. Only one man stood forth upon the hill and brandished his spear, but the Mabuyag men laughed and cried out to him to wait another two days and they would deal with them as they dealt with their houses. This was at Ith.

Then they returned to Mabuyag in their canoes for they were foolish and did not make an end of the Muans at that time. Again they sat down and took counsel together, and there were added to them a few men of Badu who were at Pulu in the camp. They gave two days' respite to the Muans and then again they set out in their canoes and came to land at Dabu. They anchored one canoe and fastened the others to it by ropes. The two boys whom they left in each assembled together in that canoe and watched so that if the Muans came upon them unawares while the fighting men were in the bush they might cut the cable and save all the canoes from harm at their hands.

The Mabuyag warriors made themselves ready for war. [...] Each stood with his great bundle of arrows under his left arm and the pearl shell shining on his breast, while Ganaia and Wanekai took the lead, bearing on their heads the trophies of Kuyam *gud* and *zar*, the cassowary plumes that towered above their heads and fell down over their faces like a visor; and on the left shoulder each of them bore the amulet swathed in ti-tree bark. Otherwise they were armed like their fellows and had bows in their left hands. The two lines went through the scrub and no one spoke, for they hoped to find the Muans unprepared. By and

by the path was lost and the two *augadh*-men halted, then pointed with their bows to where small tracks struck off. On they went through the straggling bush till the mountain Womel Pad loomed high above their heads. Again the leaders paused and pointed, and as they looked they saw a woman of Mua digging wild yams. With her were her two sons slinging stones with grass catapults at the tree-tops,<sup>6</sup> and shouting in the manner of boys when they play. The whole band sank down in the bush; only the two *augadh*-men stood still, and, moving neither to right nor to left but always watching that woman and the two boys, spat the *paiwa* from their mouths so that she would not see that they were men and escape,<sup>7</sup> for she was more than a bow-shot from them. Yet though no man spoke, the cockatoos among the trees were frightened and flew away, uttering hoarse cries, so that the woman looked to see the cause of their fear, and saw the *augadh* among the bushes. It was then that the mask of cassowary plumes stood them in good stead, for she thought 'Surely they are *gugu* birds (owls)' and cried out to her boys, 'Come, my children, and see these *gugu* for your eyes are younger than mine.' But they did not hear, being intent on their play. At this the *augadh*-men made as if they would run forward, and all men started to their feet and made haste and caught that woman and her boys, and Bainu slew her with his spear,<sup>8</sup> others followed hard after the boys and killed them too, but one, Waba, who outran the chase became as if blind, and falling came near to break his leg; which was the work of the *augadh*, for Kuyam could never allow any man to go before him into battle. When they had finished cutting off the heads of these three and had come a little further on the way through the scrub, they found the foot of the mountain, Womel Pad. Now, the sides of this mountain are steep, like the walls of a house, but as the house is covered with grass so is the rock with bushes, and by their aid they climbed to the top. And the men of Mabuyag were like ants seeking food, so thick were they upon the hill side as they followed the relics of Kuyam to battle.

When all had come to the top and gone but a little way, the two leaders halted again and pointed. Before them were the camp fires of the Muans on a level place and the women and children of the Muans sitting under those great leaves which keep out the rain and sun. (So dense do they grow that even the reek of the fires can scarcely penetrate them.) And all the Mabuyag people clutched their weapons and felt scorn for these folk that feared to dwell in the lowland but hid like the southern mainland people, who have no

houses but always dwell under the shelter of leaves and trees.<sup>9</sup>

The men of that place were all gone, except one, to the southern part of the island to cut wood for spears; thinking that their foes would come, but not then, and being besides careless and unmindful to set a guard. Tabungnazi is the name of the place where the wood for spears grows.<sup>10</sup> Again the two leaders made as if they would attack. Immediately their followers, bursting upon the camp, began to slaughter the people, and so fierce were they that none escaped – not even certain women who cried, saying, 'Spare us, men of Mabuyag, for we mourn even now for your brothers who perished, Iburu and Waiaba and Yati, our friends, for whom also you see us covered with dirt and wearing the mourners' *soegal*.'<sup>11</sup> But they paid no heed and slew them all as they cowered, this one crying, 'Take me to wife!' and that 'Kill me, only let this my little boy go free!' The old men who were not fleet of foot caught young children and babes, snatching them from their mothers' arms and giving them to their sons and grandsons who had never fought before; then the sons were instructed by their fathers how to cut the head from the body with the *upi* (bamboo beheading knife), and how to steady that head during the act, a finger thrust into each nostril. They taught them also to thread them on the head-carriers and make them fast. Thus many children perished miserably on blocks of wood as quickly as the old men could carry them.

Meanwhile Parsau of Badu wrought a great feat of arms, for nearby he found another camp full of women and children. Parsau had neither spear nor bow but only his club. Yet he let none escape but killed them all, running this way and that, smashing in their heads. After they had cut off all the heads and each had counted what he had, some were found who had three or four, some two or one – few with none, but these did not leave dishonoured, for their brothers and friends gave them their surplus.

But as they came to the bottom of the hill again, the men of Mua returned with their spear wood and a great cry went up from the camp as they recognised their women and children one by one, for none had heads and many a man was hard put to claim his dead. While they cried and searched, the warriors of Mabuyag came to a level place at the bottom of Womel Pad and began to taunt them, shouting and holding up the heads they had won, 'Come down and follow your wives', 'Come, this is your wife's head, take it. This

is your son's, take it.' The Muans were bitter and began to come down, exhorting them to prepare for death, and there would have been another fight, if the old men of Mabuyag had not ordered them all to return after the two *augadh*-men who had gone on towards the canoes, for the youths thirsted after more blood. But the counsel of the old men prevailed. 'It is no good that we fight without the *augadh* of Kuyam. That way we shall surely lose one or two of our number', and all obeyed and went and, though the Muans followed after them with angry shouts, they gained the canoes and soon arrived safe at Pulu [...]

Two months they lay at home and rested [...] Again the men of Mabuyag and Badu took counsel together against Mua. But the Badu men pleaded that they had friends and kinsmen at Mua and these must not be slain, so they were given seven days to bring those they wished to save to Badu and to lay a trap for those they wished to destroy. And this is how they accomplished their plan.

About this time a ship of the white men had stranded upon an island called Ului, not far from Badu, but the white men got away safe in their boats and no one could lay hold upon their heads. Soon the ship was found by the Badu people when out fishing and they had from it tobacco and knives, which they gave to their friends and kinsmen but kept some for themselves. Now, this white man tobacco was good and, unlike the local tobacco, all men now craved the weed and loved the Badu people exceedingly. The canoes went again and this time they brought home two cases of long knives with which white men fight. These were kept for themselves and no Mua man could get such a knife even for a canoe or a wife – only Mabuyag and Badu had them at that time.

Then the Badu men sent spies who saw that the Muans were forgetting and were taking new women as wives and besides they coveted that tobacco which they had tasted. So they brought their friends and kinsmen safely to Badu to share in their good fortune, but to the Muans they said, 'Come, meet us on the morrow at the place called Adam and we will make merry with that tobacco', having guile in their hearts. And the Muans, being greedy and bewitched also by the spell of Apus, agreed with them and began to dance along with their good friends of Badu.

When night fell, a man of Badu went out to the point called Dugu Ngur [see Fig. 1], which is over against Mabuyag, and lit a

great fire there as had been prearranged, so that all Mabuyag might come to share in that tobacco on the following day. And the Mabuyag men saw and understood the signal and hastened to put off their canoes, going first to Pulu along the shore and then out to Badu by the seaward way, for they were afraid that if they went straight the Muans would spy them and escape in the night. Then the people of Badu met them and welcomed them and said, 'It would be better for you to go to Mua tonight. In the morning we will follow after you. Take your canoes and hide them in that creek on Mua which is close to Adam. There you shall lie tonight and tomorrow we will be with you.' So the Mabuyag men did as they were bidden and slept that night in their canoes in the creek.

Adam is a level place in the midst of mangroves, and steep hills shut it in on all sides, so that it is hard for a man to go out from it with a foe behind him. This is why the Badu men had invited the Muans to Adam. When the wild fowl began to awaken and cry out – the sun being not yet up – the Mabuia people went ashore and got ready for battle. Then they marched through the mangroves till Adam was close in front and they could see the Muans round their fires, smoking the white man's tobacco and telling tales of old times. Soon came the Badu canoes, and all the men of Badu ready for war with weapons and paint and slung around their waists the long knives that they had taken from the wreck. But the Muans thought no harm but only of the tobacco and the knives and spears that the Badu men promised to give them. But first they said, 'Let us dance together.' So, when all was set in due order, they danced, but the knives and spears were not left upon the ground, as the Badu men carried them in their hands. Now, a man of Mua, seeing this, said in the language of the white man to those who know it – for in Mua there were men who had worked for the British<sup>12</sup> – 'See how they hold their spears always in their hands. Surely they mean no good to us. Come, let us fall upon them first and slay them, so that we may take their heads before we ourselves lose ours.' But a Badu man, Uria, heard the strange talk and guessed the meaning of it, even though he did not know English. So he stepped aside into the bush as if tired of the dance and met the Mabuyag men and said, 'There is treachery breeding amongst the Muans, for I heard them talk in a strange tongue. Go now and watch me when I sit down.' So he returned and sat down at the fire and the Mabuyag men came round about among the mangroves for they were not willing to let any escape. Then Uria stood up and said to the Muans, 'Look now,

my friends; remember what you did a while ago and see, a shark is coming!<sup>13</sup> Then all looked and saw the Mabuyag men advancing, but the Badu people while they looked fell upon them.

Then there was a great slaughter of Muans. Even though they too had relics of Kuyam, they were of no avail, for Kuyam gave all his power to their foes. Far away in Gumu (Goemu) on Mabuyag, men saw the dust of that battle go up like smoke. Scarcely any escaped, and even the Muans who fled were almost killed in their camp, for the old men had warned them of their folly.

Gizu<sup>14</sup> slew one man that day, being a youth at the time, and most had two or three heads at the least. But Waipat of Mabuyag had killed no one and he pursued a Muana in the bush and caught him. This man's name was Maiti and he cried aloud that he was *paudagarka* (a man of peace) and the son of Apus the wizard. So Waipat spared his life.

This Maiti was the brother of the woman Kodau who was dead and a man of peace, as it was said, whom none might harm. Therefore they brought him to Mabuyag and put red paint upon him, and though he was angry, they clothed him for the dance of the heads and forced him to play his part, carrying the skulls of his kinsfolk. Thus was the vengeance of Apus fulfilled. Three times he put the *wauri* in the oven and three times the Muans paid the price of Kodau. But the son of Apus was forced to dance at the death of his kin and stayed half a month at Mabuyag among those savage men. But they did him no harm and when his time was finished they let him go.

This is the story of the enchantment of Apus the sorcerer, of the death of his daughter after which he placed curses upon the Muans, and of the shame of his son the man of peace.

VERSION II: ALGIDA OF BADU 1915 (BURNETT, 1962). The second text appears in a letter dated 25 December 1962 from a Mrs Burnett, who was told the story by Algida (Alligator) of Badu, then an old man, but a child when the massacre took place.<sup>15</sup> Mrs Burnett claims that she wrote the story down in 1915 just as she was told it in the old mission house on Badu. I have not been able to find out anything further about Mrs Burnett, except that she left Badu in 1916. She may be the Mrs E. G. Burnett, who paid a subscription to *The Carpentarian* magazine in 1922. In her letter she states that she knew Nawai, an old man when she left Badu

in 1916. The text is a mixture of both voices and spellings have been altered to conform with modern convention.

Mabuyag men – including chief's son – prowling about islands and stealing garden stuff from women. Canoe was fast in mud – going away, one man found he'd left his knife in garden – would go back – only knife he had - found women had raised alarm. Tree fight – six Mabuyag killed. Chief's son speared in retreating – but not dead – kept off Adam men with his bow and arrows till canoe was floated. Told Adam men they should see Mabuyag men again soon. Some Mabuyag men came to Badu to get help to fight Adam. Some would, some would not. Any rate after talk they agreed to help Mabuyag and went over to Adam. Found Adam men more ready for them, so they left a spy, a young man named Nawai (an old man when I knew him in 1913). Nawai was to pretend to be a friend of Adam. The Badu and Mabuyag men went away, but agreed to plan of attack which was for Mabuyag to attack on one side and Badu on the other. Meanwhile Nawai was to lull their suspicions and fears and pretend to be friendly, saying 'Badu people not fight their friends.' But one Adam man was a traitor and agreed to give a signal when the island was defenceless. He did so and Nawai nearly lost his life, only one Adam woman saved him. Mabuyag and Badu attacked from two sides, so Adam people taken like that were afraid and couldn't talk properly, so practically all were killed. Certainly all the able-bodied men. Those who could fled to the bush and today, 1915, only a small number of Adamites remain over at Adam.

VERSION III: NAMAI OF MUA 1922 (DAVIES, 1922B). The third version appears in *The Carpentarian*, the magazine of the Diocese of Carpentaria, in October 1922. On 23-24 July 1922, the newly-enthroned bishop of Carpentaria, Stephen Davies, visited Poid,<sup>16</sup> where the churchwarden, Namai, who was a boy when the events occurred, gave the visiting dignitaries 'an account of the last fight that took place on Moa Island.' This, like all the versions, is a product of its narrator, place, time and audience and is a far shorter and more sanitised version than Version I. Unfortunately, none of the Muans is named,<sup>17</sup> nor is there any mention of the sorcerer, Apus, and his role in the defeat of the Muans. Sorcery continued to be a concern for churchmen and one suspects they were reluctant to refer to it openly.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, we find an emphasis on cannibalism, by then long abandoned, which fascinated Europeans and fed their ideas about the 'savagery' of the

traditional peoples. As leading Christians, Davies and Namai might be expected to emphasise the evils of the pre-Christian era and the rejection of revenge killings. This is the first version to mention that the battle in question was the last major battle in Torres Strait.

[Namai] remembered how the men from Mabuyag landed on the corner of Mua Island and robbed their garden, but some Mua men saw them before they got back to their boats. The alarm was given, and the Mabuyag men were surrounded, and most, if not all, killed. Of course Mua had a great feast that night at which Mabuyag heads would be the chief delicacy. Some time afterwards, men from Badu visited Mua. These men showed the usual signs of friendship, so all spears, etc., were left behind. The Badu men had evidently secured some cutlasses from a man-of-war, for Namai described them as big knives off a warship. The Mua men were being shown these treasures, and were also given tobacco, when suddenly the Badu men began to show how cutlasses could be used. Heads began to fly off. Mua men ran back for their spears but found that a party from Mabuyag had landed and got in behind them. This was the last fight on the islands but possibly there were no Mua men left of fighting age. Some on Badu still remember the feast that took place after the fight.

VERSION IV: PETER OF MABUYAG 1898 (QUEENSLAND HOME SECRETARY'S DEPARTMENT, 1928). The fourth version is an adaptation and simplification of Version I. It follows the same general sequence of events but with a simpler vocabulary, most names and Kodau's infidelity omitted, and an emphasis on the courage and fighting ability of the Muans in chasing off the Mabuyag garden raiders. It was published in 1928 in *The Torres Strait Reader*, the first English language primer targeted at senior Torres Strait Islander students and a milestone in Queensland Indigenous education. On 11 May 1927, J.D. Story, the Public Service Commissioner, and B.J. McKenna, Under Secretary of the Department for Public Instruction, visited Poid as part of an official tour of inspection of the island schools. They formed the opinion, supported by the bishop, Revd W.H. MacFarlane and others that

special reading books, suited to the local conditions, should be compiled for use in the native schools. Considering the rich store of folk-lore connected with the early history of the islands, it was considered very desirable that these old traditions should be suitably

adapted and embodied in reading lessons for the senior pupils.

The readers were intended to have 'ethnological as well as educational value' (Bleakley, 1927: 5). The misspellings of various personal and place names indicates that the editors were working from a hand-written text, not the published version. I suspect that MacFarlane may have supplied a copy of Version I to Mr Fox, who with Mr Hooper from the Public Instruction inspectors' staff prepared the text and illustrations. Although MacFarlane's 1927-1928 diary makes no mention of this, he was likely to have been consulted about the contents of the reader. A valued correspondent and contributor to A.C. Haddon's anthropological research and vitally interested in Islander education, he discussed various plans for improvement with McKenna and Story during their visit (MacFarlane, 1927). Again I have slightly altered the spellings to conform to current usage.

In olden times, wars frequently occurred between the people living on different islands. Sometimes these wars were brought about by very trivial causes, and at other times for no purpose but to teach the young men to kill their fellows.

On one occasion the men of Mabuyag had been out fishing for a week with but little success. Their food became exhausted and, owing to bad weather, they were unable to return home. They therefore landed on Mua, and the captain of the party told them to go into the gardens near and get a supply of food.<sup>19</sup>

They all went, and every man gathered a load of food to take back to the canoes. As they were leaving the garden they were seen by a woman, who ran and told the men of Mua.

The Mabuyag men were just returning for another load of food when they were met by the Muans, who showered arrows among them. The Mabuyag men immediately turned and ran to their canoes, and their retreat was covered by Gib, the captain, who effectively used his bow and arrows.

Three of the Mabuyag men were killed, and several others who were wounded just managed to reach the canoes, which they with difficulty pushed into deep water. Luckily for the men of Mabuyag, they were not pursued further.

They had seen three of their men killed, but one other was missing – a man named Parsau. He had hidden in the bush during the fight

and afterwards managed to reach the shore in a different direction. When all was quiet he plunged into the sea and swam across to Badu. Here he was received kindly, for the Badu people were friends and allies of the people of Mabayag.

Gib's canoe soon reached Badu. He talked with the men of that island, and they agreed to wait a month so that the Muans might forget the recent fight and be unprepared. Then the warriors from both islands would join together and punish them.

There lived at Daum Poid,<sup>20</sup> on Mua, a sorcerer named Apus, whose daughter Kodau was married to a man named Muyam. Now, about this time, Muyam, in his anger, slew his wife Kodau. This act struck fear into the hearts of the men when they heard of it, and they lamented, crying, 'The child of the sorcerer is dead.'

When Apus was told of the death of his daughter he wanted to be avenged. He brooded for a time, and thought of how he might cast a spell upon the Muans, making them as weak as children and as faint-hearted as women, so that they might become an easy prey for their enemies. So he worked magic on the Muans, making them forget the recent fight, and so neglect to prepare for an immediate attempt of revenge by the Mabayag warriors.

While these things were taking place at Mua, the men of Mabayag were considering their plans to avenge the death of those whom the Muans had recently killed. One party was in favour of attacking at once; the other party thought it would be better to forget their quarrel, because they had done wrong in taking food from the Muans' gardens.

Those favouring an immediate attack, however, prevailed, and preparations were made for the fight. The Mabayag warriors sailed openly in their canoes and were joined by some of the Badu men.

When they reached Mua they found that the Muans had deserted their villages. So, after burning the huts and destroying the gardens, they returned to Badu. After resting here for two days they again sailed across to Mua.

The warriors made themselves ready for war by painting their bodies red, putting on cross-belts of bamboo leaves, waist-belts and anklets, as well as fringed rings of the same material below the knee. They fastened bamboo leaves round their heads, and stuck white feathers in

these head-dresses so that they might know one another in the battle. Some carried bows and arrows and a few carried spears.

Not many carried spears, because these were the arms of the Badu men and the Mua men. A great many carried stone clubs. A few had knives and hatchets obtained from white men. Each had a great bundle of arrows under his left arm and a shining pearl-shell on his breast.

Gauair [Ganaia] and Wauckai [Wanekai] went in front. They wore the trophies and *augadh* of Kuyam, with cassowary plumes above their heads.

They led the men along a path through the bush, but this path soon came to an end. Then they discovered a small track leading from the path, and, pointing in this direction, they continued to lead.

After going a short distance they saw a woman digging, with her two boys playing near. All the warriors except the *augadh* men immediately sank to the ground. The *augadh* men stood quite still and were not noticed by the woman and her children.

A flock of cockatoos, however, saw them and flew away screaming. This made the woman look round. She saw the cassowary plumes, and, thinking they were birds, called to her boys, 'Come here and look at these strange birds.' The *augadh* men then gave the signal and all the band rushed forward, caught the woman and her boys, and killed them.

They now went on to the foot of the steep mountain named Womel Pad. The sides of this mountain were so steep that they could not walk up, but they managed to climb up by holding on to trees and vines which grew on the mountain side.

At length all reached the top, and, going forward, came to a flat piece of ground on which, a short distance away, they saw the camp-fires of the Muans. There were no huts, but the women and children were sheltering under the thick foliage of the trees. On seeing this, the warriors grasped their weapons tightly, and looked with scorn on the people who were afraid to live on the low land but hid thus under trees on the mountain.

All the men of Mua except one had gone to the south side of the island to cut spear-wood. Though they expected that the men of Mabayag would attack them again, they did not think

they would come so soon, and, consequently, had not set a guard.

The *augadh* men gave the signal, and all rushed forward and killed every woman and child and the one man who had been left in the camp. Many of the women begged for their lives or for the lives of their children, but no mercy was shown to anyone.

The warriors then left, but before they reached the foot of the mountain, the men of Mua returned to their camp. Seeing the bodies of their wives and children scattered on the plain, they made a great outcry. This cry was heard by the Mabuyag warriors, who jeered at the Muans.

The men of Mua then followed the invaders, who were anxious to turn and fight, but their *augadh* men led them back to their canoes, and they had to follow because they believed that they could not be victorious unless they were led by the *augadh* of Kuyam.

Great rejoicing was made on Mabuyag when the warriors returned.

After two months had passed, the men of Mabuyag and Badu again took counsel together against the Muans. The Badu men said that they had friends at Mua and these must not be killed. It was therefore agreed not to attack till after seven days, to give time for these friends to be got away from Mua.

A ship had lately been stranded on a sandbank not far away. The white men who owned it had been unable to get their ship off the bank, and so had left in their boats.

While out fishing some Badu men saw this deserted vessel, and went on board, where they found much very good tobacco and many knives. These they took and shared with their friends and kinsmen. The tobacco grown on the islands was poor, so only a few men smoked it, but all wanted to smoke the ship's tobacco when they found how good it was.

The men went again to the ship, and brought away two cases of long knives called swords, with which white men fight. They kept all these for themselves and did not speak of them to the Muans.

They pretended to be friendly with the Muans, but they were only seeking an opportunity to join with the Mabuyag men in another attack. Some of them visited Mua and secretly warned their friends to leave Mua and go to Badu, telling them of the good things which they had

obtained from the ship, and promising them a share.

While speaking in this way to their friends, they gave tobacco to the Muans, and noticed that they had married other wives and were again living in their village. The kindness shown to them made the Muans think that their old enemies were now their friends.

Before leaving Mua, the Badu men said to the Muans, 'Meet us tomorrow at the place called Adam, and we will make merry and give you more tobacco and other presents.' As the Muans were very greedy, they readily consented.

That night a man of Badu went to Dugu Ngur and lit a signal fire as had been agreed upon. This fire was seen by the men of Mabuyag, and the warriors set out in canoes. They kept close to the shore of Pulu, and then crossed to Badu by the seaward side, so that the Muans might not see them and try to escape during the night.

When the Mabuyag men arrived at Badu, they arranged that they should go secretly across to Adam and remain hidden by the mangroves during the night, and the Badu men should follow in the morning. As soon as it became quite dark the Mabuyag warriors left Badu and went to their hiding place on the other side of the strait.

Adam is a level piece of ground, surrounded on one side by mangroves and by steep hills on the other sides, making it almost impossible for men to escape from a foe if attacked from the mangrove side.

Next morning, as soon as the wild birds began to awaken and cry out, the Mabuyag warriors went ashore, got ready for battle, and marched through the mangroves till they came close to Adam, where they halted. They could see the Muans sitting by their fires smoking, talking, and laughing. The Badu warriors, with their bodies painted, soon arrived in their canoes. All were carrying their fighting weapons and the knives taken from the white men's ship.

But the Mua men did not suspect any danger. Being very greedy, they thought only of the tobacco and knives and spears which they believed would be given to them. They greeted the Badu men and said to them, 'Let us first dance together.' They all commenced to dance, but the Badu men kept their spears and knives in their hands.

A Mua man who had learned to speak English said to other Muans who knew that language: 'See, they carry their knives and spears in their hands. Surely they mean to do us harm! Let us kill them before they can kill us.'

This was heard by a Badu man named Uria, but he did not understand what was said. He went aside into the bush, however, and told the Mabayag warriors that he thought there was treachery, because he heard the Muans talking in a strange language. He said, 'Watch me when I sit down.' He returned and sat down near the fire.

The Mabayag men then came closer through the mangroves, for they were determined to let none escape. Uria then stood up and said: 'Friends, you remember what you did a while ago. See, a shark is coming.' Then all the Muans looked towards the mangroves where the Mabayag warriors were hidden.

The Badu warriors immediately fell upon them from behind, and the Mabayag men attacked them from the front. Hardly any of the Muans escaped, and even those who did get away to their village were very nearly killed by the old men, who had warned them of the danger they were taking in going to the meeting place. The people at Goemu and at Badu saw the dust of the battle go up like smoke, and there was great rejoicing, for they believed that their warriors were victorious.

VERSION VI: NAMAI OF MUA AND KOKOA OF BADU 1932 (MURPHY, 1966). J.E. Murphy, who published a number of magazine articles on Torres Strait marine life, was told the story on Badu by Kokoa and Namai in 1932. Again the intended audience is a general European one and the details chosen to attract and hold its interest. It is bookended by references to the union levy in 1965 to raise money for a bakery at St Paul's, although Murphy does not seem to be aware of the historical relationship between the two Muans communities. Murphy adds a new piece of information in specifying the Argan people from western Badu as those who found the tobacco and cutlasses and organised the final massacre.<sup>21</sup> The date he gives, mid-1870s, is almost certainly incorrect, since that post-dates the arrival of Christian missionaries on Mua and the Badu Islanders were by then used to Europeans and their food. There are several other inaccuracies e.g., women accompanying the war party. This is also the first version to mention, let alone foreground, the cargo of cement, which provides a revenge motive. I find the damper

story unconvincing: far more plausible is Isaac Charlie's Version XI, where the Islanders' puzzled response to the sacks of 'dust' is to get rid of them.

The spoiled damper which began the train of events that led to the bloody extermination of the 350 native population of Mua Island, in Torres Strait, was no ordinary damper. I was reminded of it by a recent decision of the Waterside Workers' Federation to levy members throughout Australia to provide a \$11,000 bakery for the Mua Islanders, at the suggestion of Jacob Abednego, one of the head men.

In 1932, outside the Island Industries Board's store on Mulgrave Island [Badu], I talked to two old men. One was Kokoa, who had taken part in the massacre of the Muans. The other was Namai, the last of his tribe and one of the only two survivors of that red morning in the middle 1870s.

On most maps Mua is charted as Banks Island, and is so named after Captain Cook's botanist. Mulgrave Island and Mua Island are separated by a shallow strait only about three miles (4.8km) wide. Both lie some 35 miles (56.3km) north-west of Thursday Island.

Since old Namai died soon after I talked with him and Kokoa that day, it follows that the present occupants of Mua are not the descendants of the original inhabitants, although I remember Jacob Abednego's father there in the 1930s.

*Survivor's tale of a slaughter.*

I pieced the story of the slaughter together while I talked to Kokoa and Namai after first dividing a length of rope-stick tobacco between them. They both enjoyed telling the story, each corroborating the other's version.

It all began when the men of the Argan tribe, on Mulgrave, came upon the shell of a wrecked Port Essington (NT)-bound freighter in Napoleon Passage, one of the labyrinth of reef-studded waterways of the Torres Strait.

I never learned what became of the crew of the wrecked ship. However, song-and-dance routines of the Argan tribe today still tell of the salvaging of two worthwhile parts of the cargo. One was a consignment of cutlasses. The other was several tons of cement, which was mistaken for flour.

*King-size oven for a damper.*

When they had recovered from the initial shock of their good fortune, the Arganians

planned a high holiday, in which they invited their fellow Mulgravian tribes of Badu and Wakaid to share. To roast an original king-sized damper, a huge oven of white-hot stones was made. The offer of hospitality was not extended to the Muans, separated by only the three-mile-wide strait, and with whom the Mulgravians were then at peace.

To the chagrin of the Mulgravians, the mighty damper chipped, hardened and solidified before their eyes as it baked. An inter-tribal council of head men was hastily convened to investigate the cause of the phenomenon. After due deliberation the council came to the conclusion that there was only one possible explanation. This was *puripuri*, or malevolent magic, on the part of the Muans, who were resentful of their exclusion from the feast,

At this point the cutlasses were remembered and a revenge plan was born. It was carried out with maximum guile. After a few days, the Mulgravians, by drum and conch-shell message sounded across the strait, announced their intention of paying a friendly call on their neighbours of Mua.

Since it was some years since either community had paid a call motivated by cannibalism on each other the Muans signalled that the call would be welcomed. As a precautionary measure, however, they included in their message a suggestion that they would meet their guests in mid-strait with a flotilla of escorting canoes.

*A subterfuge to hide the trick.*

The Mulgravians expressed appreciation of the gesture and advised that their women and children would be among the visitors and would occupy the leading canoes. As it was meant to do, this advice literally disarmed the Muans, who sent out only a token number of escorting canoes.

The crews of the escorting canoes put back to shore on observing that, as forecast by their guests, the leading Mulgrave canoes were laden with women and children. By this manoeuvre the Muans doomed themselves.

The Mulgravian woman and children in the first flotilla of canoes beached their craft and began to lay out rolled bundles of sleeping mats in a long line on the beach. They had just completed this task when the seemingly unarmed menfolk among the guests grounded their craft, stepped ashore and stood in ceremonial line beside the bundles of mats. The unsuspecting Muans, unarmed, walked down on to a narrow sand spit to greet their

guests. At a signal, and with perfect timing, the Mulgravians unrolled the mats, seized the concealed cutlasses, and fell upon the helpless hosts, whose stone-headed clubs and bamboo knives in any case would have been of little value against the cutlasses, even disregarding the surprise element.

The Mulgravian women and children joined in the slaughter. Among the children was Kokoa, son of the chief of the Argan tribe.

*Saved by his mother's swim.*

The only Muans who survived were a young woman and her toddler son, who clung to his mother's neck as she swam a shark-infested creek to escape along the mangrove-lined coast.<sup>22</sup>

They were picked up by the crew of a 'floating station' – mobile trading centre – operated by a European trader. The small boy was Namai.

Eventually, Mua Island was re-settled when the Queensland Government moved the native populations of several other islands there. The descendants of these comparative newcomers, and not those of the original inhabitants, will receive the \$11,000 bakery donation by the Waterside Workers' Federation.

VERSION VI: UNKNOWN, POSSIBLY NAMAI C.1934 (PATTERSON, 1938). This version was written for a European audience presumed to have no knowledge of Mua or the people involved in the massacre. It contains no Islander names but emphasises the shipwreck, the acquisition of European weapons by the Badu warriors and head-hunting, all minor factors in the first four versions. There is no mention of Mabuyag's role. This is the first version, so far as I can discover, to identify the *Antagonist* as the vessel wrecked, thus dating the battle in 1863 and linking the Muans' fate with newly established Port Essington; to name Namai and his mother as the sole survivors; and to claim that Mua was abandoned after the battle until the establishment of St Paul's Mission, a claim repeated by Singe (1989: 169). If Namai were the source of the story, Patterson's visit must predate Namai's death on 9 September 1934.

Mua Island is not well known, despite the fact that it is one of the most interesting islands in the Pacific, having unusual features and an unusual history. The story of the island is the story of what is probably the only case on record of the wreck of a British warship being indirectly responsible for a terrible massacre in which a native tribe was annihilated – with

the exception of a woman and her baby boy. [...]

In those days the Mua Islanders' greatest enemies were the natives of the neighbouring Badu (or Mulgrave) Island. Badu lies about a mile to the west of Mua, from which it is separated by a shallow passage.

For many years a great rivalry had existed between the natives of the two islands. They were always at war with each other, and in the passage terrible battles frequently took place between canoe loads of Mua and Badu warriors.

In fact, it was considered a wonderful achievement for either a Mua or Badu warrior to secure the head of a warrior from his neighbouring island.

This fierce rivalry continued until 1863, when a terrible massacre took place on Mua Island and strangely enough, this massacre was an indirect result of the wreck of a British warship. This ship, HMS *Antagonist*, was travelling from Sydney to the Northern Territory, where a new British military settlement (the first in Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn), had been established at Port Essington, along the northern coast of the Territory.

The *Antagonist* was conveying food supplies and equipment, including weapons, to the new settlement, and although the voyage from Sydney to Torres Strait proved uneventful, the vessel met with misfortune shortly after entering the Strait.

A cyclonic storm arose, and the ship's rudder was damaged during the hurricane; then, helpless, the vessel was driven on to jagged coral rocks off the north-eastern coast of Badu.

Fortunately, no lives were lost at the wreck; all the sailors managed to escape in lifeboats, and ultimately, after a trying voyage across 500 miles (800km) of open sea, they reached the settlement at Port Essington.

The wreck of the *Antagonist* had been witnessed by the Badu natives, who, fierce head-hunters like their neighbours on Mua, had been hoping to secure the heads of some of the sailors, and remained hidden in the bush waiting for the survivors to come ashore. Consequently, there was much disappointment on the island when the sailors were seen to disappear in their boats, and after the storm had passed a fleet of canoes immediately went out to inspect the wreck.

The ill-fated vessel was gradually slipping down into deep water, but before she disappeared under the waves the natives managed to salvage several cases of tobacco and a number of boxes of brand new cutlasses intended for the soldiers at Port Essington. The tobacco, especially, was welcomed by the natives, but they had never seen cutlasses before. However, the chief of the island soon learned, after a little experimenting on pigs, that the razor-sharp weapons would make ideal equipment for his best warriors; and they he conceived a cunning plan for wiping out his enemies – the natives of Mua.

For several days thereafter a group of selected warriors spent all their time practising with the new weapons, and they soon became proficient in wielding the cutlasses.

When the Badu chief considered the time ripe for putting his plan in operation, he sent a canoe-load of unarmed warriors across to Mua bearing as a 'peace gift' a case of tobacco for the chief of Mua. The latter was also given a message intimating that if all the people of Mua assembled, unarmed, on the beach next morning, another two cases of tobacco would be brought across and distributed among them. The news caused great excitement on Mua, the natives seriously believing that the Badu people had had enough of fighting and wanted to make friends with them.

At any rate, early next morning two canoe loads of Badu warriors landed with the two cases of tobacco. The warriors were apparently unarmed and carried only their rolled cane sitting-mats, without which no Torres Strait native on a peaceful mission would travel in those days. But, unknown, of course, to the people of Mua, each of the warriors had hidden in his mat one of the new cutlasses which had been salvaged from the wreck.

Immediately they landed, the warriors unrolled their mats, and with the weapons hidden underneath, calmly sat down to wait for the flies to walk into the parlor.

Eager to obtain the tobacco, the inhabitants of Mua, men, women and children, chiefs and warriors, flocked down, unarmed, to the beach. As soon as they began to crowd round the cases of tobacco, the Badu warriors slowly got to their feet, and, unobserved, they surrounded the Mua natives. Then, at a given signal, they withdrew their cutlasses and rushed forward.

A terrible slaughter followed. The warriors were the champion fighting men of Badu,

and they wiped out the Mua tribe with the exception of two, a woman and a baby boy, who managed to escape undetected from the island in a canoe.

After a two days' journey she reached Hammond Island, near Cape York, where the natives gave her protection. That woman's son, Namai, now an old man, is still living on Mua Island. He and his mother returned there some years after the tragedy.

For several years after the massacre, Mua Island remained uninhabited. Then the Queensland Government took over the control of the whole of the Torres Strait islands and their natives. As a result of punitive expeditions and missionary work the natives were tamed, and then the Government created ten of the islands closed native reserves, prohibited to white men, among which the four thousand-odd natives were distributed.

Mua Island was created one of the reserves, and the natives of Hammond Island were moved there, with the sole survivor of the Mua tribe and her son, Namai.

These natives and their descendants are still there, and they live a happy and carefree existence, engaged chiefly in fishing for trochus-shell, pearl-shell and bêche-de-mer.

VERSION VII: UNKNOWN, POSSIBLY PATTERSON 1938 (EDWARDS, 1997). Ron and Anne Edwards visited Kubin in 1997 and were fortunate to have had access to material kept in the Kubin State School, which was later sent to Horn Island and is said to have been burned. The Edwards' version, found on p. 6, seems to be a condensation of Patterson's Version VI: the only new pieces of information are (1) that the site of the massacre was Arkai, site of present-day Kubin, which is incorrect;<sup>23</sup> and (2) that women were taken to Badu as spoils of war.

The story goes that around 1863 a warship was wrecked on a reef near Badu. Amongst the good[s] salvaged by the Badu Islanders were boxes of tobacco and cutlasses. With these new weapons the Badu warriors decided to lay a trap for the people of Mua Island.

They sailed across to Mua and landed at Arkai (Kubin) and then they invited the people of Mua to a big feast, promising them gifts of tobacco. The people of Mua came to the feast, suspecting nothing, and when the Badu people saw that they were all sitting and eating they produced their cutlasses and attacked them.

The men were killed and most of the women taken to Badu. Because of this the island remained almost deserted for many years. One historian (Patterson) claimed in an account published in 1939 that the inhabitants of Mua were totally exterminated in the Badu raid and the island remained uninhabited for some years. However some must have survived because of the settlement at Totalai.'

VERSION VIII: UNKNOWN, POSSIBLY PATTERSON 1938 (SINGE, 1989). Singe's version is a concise overview of the basic events, first published as Singe (1979: 184) and then as Singe (1989: 169-170). An historian and a teacher of history at Thursday Island State High School for about 20 years, Singe hedges his account with the passive voice constructions 'it is claimed' and 'are supposed to', thus specifying neither who made the claim nor the supposition, nor to whom they were made. Singe is a fine writer, who deftly summarises the conventional sources, but he provides no new information.

It is claimed that the people of Mua were exterminated in the course of a long war with Badu. Through the wreck of the HMS *Antagonist* near Badu in 1863 the Badulgal had gained possession of a number of cutlasses and some quantity of tobacco. The cunning Badulgal saw how both these things could be used to advantage. A meeting was arranged where the people of Mua and Badu could sit down unarmed and discuss an end to their long quarrel. The Badulgal even sent along some tobacco as a gesture of their goodwill.

The Mua people, who were semi-nomadic, and had been faring badly in the quarrels, were happy at the prospect of a negotiated peace though they could not have trusted their volatile neighbours. However, when the Badu warriors arrived at the beach they carried nothing but the crates of tobacco from the *Antagonist* and their tightly rolled sitting mats. The tobacco was distributed generously by the grinning warriors to all and sundry. The unfortunate Mualgal did not notice until too late that as each Badu man unrolled his mat he drew forth a gleaming cutlass. Only one woman and her baby boy are supposed to have escaped the massacre in which all the rest of their people died.

VERSION IX: IDRIESS (1947). From the fiction writer, Ion Llewellyn Idriess, who lived for a time in Torres Strait in the late 1920s and became a life-long friend of Revd MacFarlane, comes another version written for the general public (Idriess, 1947: 141-142), a single paragraph and

merely a peripheral episode in Idriess's account of the deeds of Wini (or Wongai). Wini's origin is unknown and has been much speculated upon. He lived on Badu for many years and gained a reputation as a ruthless warrior (Chester, 1871, Jardine, 1865; MacGillivray, 1852). Idriess's novel, though based in fact, is fictional and the reader cannot always demarcate the two, a point made by the historical novelist, Peter Pinney (1986), who comments that Idriess is 'a trifle careless with historical fact', and by Fuary (1997) about his novel, *Drums of Mer*. Wini's participation in the final battle of Mua is not attested elsewhere, except in Lock (1955) and, in fact, he was probably dead by the time of the battle (Chester, 1871).<sup>24</sup>

The Badu Islanders were at war with Mua and Mabuyag. Wongai (Wini) organised the warriors, defeated the Mabuyag raiders and captured the war *augadh* of Kuyam, after which he offered them alliance. 'Wongai trained the warriors of Badu village, of Maydh and Muvi villages. With these and the warriors of Mabuyag in the dead of night he took his canoes across the water and attacked the great village of Mua. They killed nearly all the people – many were burned to death in the flames!' The Kaurareg were allied to Mua.

VERSION X: MANASE BANI 1967 (LAWRIE, 1970). Margaret Lawrie visited Torres Strait in the late 1960s, collecting traditional stories which she published in her fine book, *Myths and legends of Torres Strait* (Lawrie, 1970). This version, told by Manase Bani at Mabuyag on 27 September 1967, appears on pp. 121-122. Lawrie entitles the story 'Waiaba' after the only married member of the original band of garden raiders from Mabuyag and thus the only one whose name is still remembered. She was told that it was 'a factual account of the last fight between Mabuiag and Mua' and that it took place shortly before the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1871.

A party of men, all of whom were young and unmarried except one named Waiaba, set out in a canoe to hunt turtle and dugong.

At Sarbi, a small island close to Mua, they went ashore and dug up many nests of turtle eggs. Afterwards they paddled to Mua and landed at Totalai, where they visited the gardens belonging to the people of that place and dug up many yams. These they loaded into their canoe, and then they returned to their homes at Mabuiag.

Several days later they decided to go again to Sarbi and Totalai for turtle eggs and yams.

By that time, however, the Mualgal had discovered the theft from their gardens and were constantly on the watch for strangers. Therefore, when they saw a Mabuiag canoe approaching, they said: 'These must be the men who stole our yams. Let us welcome them appropriately.' And they spread a mat in the shade of a tree close to the beach and placed stone-headed clubs beneath the mat.

Upon arriving at Totalai, Waiaba said to the young men: 'Stay with the canoe. I shall go alone to the gardens.' The Mualgal watched from behind bushes as he walked across the beach, and then they clubbed him and cut off his head. One of the Mualgal held it up for the men in the canoe to see. The canoe put back to Mabuiag immediately.

A plan was formed at Mabuiag to avenge the killing of Waiaba, and the men made ready their fighting gear. The two [replica] Kuyam *augad* – crescentic emblems of turtle-shell – were rubbed with the scented leaves of *takar* and *matua*. 'The Mualgal have sparked off a mighty blaze (*Ina Mualgal kai mui nitungul*),' said the men of Mabuiag.

Meanwhile at Mua the people of Totalai had moved some distance inland to Töit [Thoeith], knowing full well the retribution that would be exacted for Waiaba's head. They likened the coming fight to the fire which results from setting alight dead grass which has stood for several years without burning off (*Ina ngalpa senakai kai mui ngari guit waiangul*).

Many canoes were paddled across from Mabuiag to Mua. They arrived after dark and, in the middle of the night, ran into the mangroves where they were screened from sight. At first light, the men went ashore and formed into two lines, each under the leadership of a man who wore a Kuiam *augad*. In this formation they moved silently through the *zanga* trees,<sup>25</sup> their presence on Mua known only to *surka* [scrub hen], who called an alarm from time to time.

Very early that morning, a woman and her small daughter walked some distance from Töit to pluck fruit from a *kupa* tree. While her mother was filling her baskets, the little girl saw the two leaders of the Mabuiag fighters. Frightened, she ran to her mother and buried her head in her mother's grass skirt. 'What are they?' she whispered. 'Are they ghosts?' When the mother saw them she said: 'Daughter, the shark of Zugu is streaking towards its prey for the kill (*Kai senakai zugutiam walmai-ima*).

See, behind the two *augad* are the feather head-dresses (*dari*) of the men whom they lead. That is why *surka* has called so often. We must try to warn the people at Töit.' They were too late.

Before the mother and daughter reached their people, the men from Mabuia had already begun to shoot arrows at the Mualgal; soon they were fighting at close quarters with their clubs. The dust raised by pounding feet on dry earth was like smoke. When it settled, all the Mualgal were dead but one man who had managed to escape by running away. He was pursued, killed by a blow from a *gabagaba*, and beheaded.

VERSION XI: ISAAC CHARLIE OF BADU 2002 (SHNUKAL, 2002). In 2002 Isaac Charlie related the story to me from a Badu perspective as part of a conversation about his grandfather, Salepapela. There is some new information here: chronological specification with respect to the Badu cult heroes, the brothers Wayi and Sorbai; and to Sagigi, also mentioned as the leader of Badu at the time of the battle by Ephraim Bani to Ambrose Bin Juda (pers. comm., 2006).<sup>26</sup> As in Idriess's version, the author associates local mythical heroes with the final battle, here probably more a cultural than a temporal reference point. Not all the people of Mua were killed, according to Isaac Charlie, and we can assume that those who escaped into the bush (along with the Muans removed to Badu by their kinspeople) were able to regroup in time and eventually form the settlement at Totalai in the 1870s under the protection of the missionaries. Isaac Charlie's account of the Badulgal reaction to the flour seems to me to be more psychologically valid than Murphy's story of the 'death damper.'

Just before Wayi and Sorbai, a ship was wrecked or attacked by the Badu people. On board was flour (which they thought was dust and wondered why Whites would keep dust in bags and spilled it out), cows (which they thought were dogs and were scared of being bitten) and rice, which they thought was *magat* 'maggots' (*kupar* in Kala Lagaw Ya). But there were also swords and someone showed how you could cut down rope, so they knew how sharp they were. The Badu people took the swords with them when they went to attack Mua at Poid, the last battle with Mua. This was when old Sagigi was there, just before the Light came to Badu. The Mua people had hidden their *gabagab* (clubs) under their mats and, when the time was ready, they grappled their *gabagab* to attack. But the Badu people drew their swords and

killed almost all the Mua people; only a few managed to run away into the bush. The Badu people put the swords into a cave on Badu.

#### FURTHER DISCUSSION

The 'final battle of Mua' has an iconic status as an oft-repeated narrative of Torres Strait history still relevant today. It presents a number of problems for researchers seeking to bridge the divide between pre- and post-contact events in a considered, careful and respectful manner. One of the aims of this chapter was to make available all the versions I could find as a *sibuwanan* for the people of Mua, since it is difficult to access most of them. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of Namai's versions, mediated through Europeans, there is no Muan viewpoint, all the other versions coming either from Mabuayag or Badu or from European intermediaries.

The foregoing versions demonstrate a number of aspects of Torres Strait story-telling which pose problems for contemporary researchers. First, telling stories is inevitably circumscribed by rules of ownership and geography. Thus, the Mabuayag people, while voluble about their own exploits and participation in the battle, are reticent about discussing the Badu contribution and vice versa. This is to be expected: I have lost count of the number of times I have been sent to others after requesting some clarification of a story, not in the gift of the teller, with the words: 'Well, that's their story.' Second, with the passage of time certain elements no longer as relevant as previously for either the speaker or hearer(s) tend to disappear. Similar stories are conflated and names are forgotten. Thus more recent versions lack the richness of detail of the earliest version: on Mabuayag, for example, only Waiaba's name is remembered, presumably since he was the only man to leave descendants. The names of the unmarried tend to be forgotten after two or three generations unless some written record can be retrieved.

If the aim of researchers is to clarify six aspects of their topic – what? who? where? how? when? why? and why is it important? – the preceding narratives provide enough convergent information to answer all but one of these questions. In this case the evidence strongly suggests that such a battle took place, that it involved the people of Mabuayag and Badu as the aggressors and the Muans as the victims and that many Muans were killed. As far as I can judge from genealogical data, most of the various protagonists named were born around

the middle of the nineteenth century and could well have participated in the battle. We are also given a detailed account of where the various assaults took place on Mua, how the battle was planned and waged and the manner in which the victims were murdered and their heads taken. The motive, revenge for the killing by Muans of Mabuyag garden raiders, likewise seems plausible, given that the Muans and their near neighbours were locked into continuous cycles of war.

But why was the battle so important that versions of it continue to be narrated into the present day? The answer seems to be that it is what historians refer to as a 'defining discontinuity' for the people of Mua. Such defining discontinuities, often battles or revolutions, mark turning points in the history of a people or nation and tend to be commemorated, whereas other events, equally murderous or skilfully strategised, are largely forgotten. The last battle of Mua continues to be retold because it marks the defining turning point in Muan (and Torres Strait Islander) history: the cessation of the traditional practice of revenge killings, banned by the colonial and missionary authorities. Irrespective of the number of actual deaths and the severity of its aftermath, the battle has become a symbolic boundary marker between *bipotaim* (the period predating sustained European contact) and the new order and all that follows from that historical divide. And, even if it alone did not cause the collapse of Muan society and the depopulation of the island, the psychological wounds of years of reciprocal warfare, culminating in this final battle and the loss of a generation of warriors, must have contributed to it.

If we accept this analysis, we are led to the question of dating the battle. As always in any attempt to situate pre-contact Torres Strait events within the wider historical context, precise dating is almost always problematic. The chronology of narrated events tends to be a preoccupation of European researchers rather than their Islander colleagues. Torres Strait languages and story-telling conventions assign primacy to (local) place and person, invariably intertwined, with time a secondary feature. Matsumoto (1983: 359) goes so far as to say that time as an abstract phenomenon has no meaning for Islanders. Rather, time is always accompanied by observable natural phenomena and precise dates have no meaning or purpose, unless linked to observable and meaningful phenomena. Traditional life was perceived as cyclical, not linear, marked by the annual recurrence of natural events, and the daily lives of communities moved in tandem

with those cyclical rhythms. Fishing, foraging, gardening and trading were governed by seasonal fluctuations and Islanders read natural signs as we would consult a calendar (see Eseli, 1998: 40-61). It was imperative to be a good observer of natural phenomena, since the life of the community depended upon the migrations of birds and marine life, the flowerings of plants and the movements of stars. The primacy accorded to place is overwhelmingly evident in the grammatical and lexical systems of the three Torres Strait languages, where notions of spatiality are woven into the grammatical fabric of each language and deictics far more extensive than in most European languages. The same principle is at work in the extremely dense network of named places on each island, far greater than in comparable areas of the mainland.

Regarding the year of the battle, all that can be said with certainty is that it took place before – even shortly before – the missionaries began their work in the area in early November 1872 but after a shipwreck in the vicinity of Badu, which provided the tobacco and cutlasses central to the attack plan. It is not until Patterson's 1938 article that any precise date is given and that date hinges on the identification of the wrecked ship (which provided the means to trick the Muans) with the British warship, HMS *Antagonist*, which was wrecked on 14 May 1863 on Green Island Reef en route to Port Essington and India and abandoned by the crew (Nicholson, 1996: 206; Pixley, 1970; Rhodes, 1934, II: 66).<sup>27</sup>

The barque *Antagonist* was owned by Robert Towns of Sydney and, according to Nicholson (1996: 206), the crew was saved but 'horses to the value of £1000 and stores worth £2500 were lost.' There is, however, some dispute as to which Green Island was referred to, either Green Island near Cairns or Green Island (Ilap or Ilapnab) in Banks Channel, which runs south of Mua and Badu. Rhodes opts for the Torres Strait location, Nicholson for Cairns. An article by one of the crew from the wrecked schooner, *Jeannie Deans*, in the *Courier* of 16 November 1864 (Pixley, 1970) supports Nicholson and his information was confirmed by Jimmy Maori, who worked for Frank Jardine at Somerset in the 1860s and 1870s and became a great friend of Revd MacFarlane. He told MacFarlane (c.1925) that he was aboard the *Jeannie Deans* when it came to grief on Green Island near Cairns and witnessed the actual wreck of the *Antagonist* on a reef to windward. The fact that the *Antagonist*

was not wrecked in Torres Strait but at least 650km away invalidates the 1863 (or 1862) date.

Was any other vessel wrecked in Torres Strait in Badulgal territory prior to 1872, which might provide a plausible alternative candidate? As it happens, there is one contained in an official list of Torres Strait wrecks between 1864 and 1876 (Chester, 1876): the *Honolulu*, a German three-masted schooner carrying coal from Newcastle to Ternate, is reported as having been seen aground on 20 July 1870 on a reef in the North East Channel (Chester, 1870).<sup>28</sup> The reef is identified by Nicholson (1996: 305) as Moresby Rock, about 1½ miles (2.4km) from Saddle Island;<sup>30</sup> and Pixley (1970) quotes from an article in the *Courier*, dated 7 October 1870, identifying the *Honolulu* as being wrecked on Saddle Island, Torres Strait. There is some confusion in the literature between Ului (West Island) and Ulu (Saddle Island) but it appears that Ului (mentioned in Version I) is the wreck site.

If the *Honolulu* is indeed the wreck in question, can we find further corroboration in the contemporary documentary record? Again, there is material to be found in a report by the Police Magistrate at Somerset, H.M. Chester (1871), to the Colonial Secretary. Chester reports on visits he had recently made to Mabuyag, Badu and Mua, which seem to fit more accurately the battle's details and support the 1870 date. Mabuyag lay outside the usual navigating channels and was not known to have been visited by Europeans until the boats of the *Pakeha* and *Melanie* obtained pearl and turtle shell there, probably around September 1870. The crews told Chester:

The natives (of Mabuyag) had recently returned from a successful foray on Banks island in which they had killed thirteen of the Italeega [Italgai] and carried off several women. The fresh skulls were then hanging in their huts. They saw also a quantity of damaged tobacco, which probably came from the wreck of the *Honolulu*.

If we accept that the battle took place, that its notoriety derives from its status as the final raid on Mua by the Mabuyag and Badu Islanders and that it occurred just prior to the arrival of the missionaries in early November 1872, the 1870 date would seem to be a far more plausible candidate than 1863. Chester (1871) obliquely points to the connection in his report of a visit to Mua in 1871, where he found the people 'living in perpetual dread of their powerful neighbors.' The LMS missionary Gill (1876: 200), who

landed on Mua several times in October 1872 echoes Chester's observation about the Muans:

The islanders are noted for their cruelty to defenceless whites; but they are themselves fearfully oppressed by the men of Badu (Mulgrave's Island) and their allies, the Jervis Islanders [...]. The natives occupy only the interior and the weather side of the island through terror of the Badu warriors. The Muans themselves blamed the people of Badu and Mabuiag for their depleted numbers and sought to ally themselves with the Europeans to take revenge.

The 1870 date also fits, not only the identification of Ului as the wreck's site, but also two other details recounted in the earliest (and undoubtedly most accurate) account: the salvaged tobacco, alluded to by Chester, who was probably told of the trick played by the Badu men; and the use of English by the Muans. Learning enough of a language to give warnings and instructions, even for the linguistically-gifted Islanders, presupposes a period of fairly close interaction. If indeed the battle had taken place in 1863, the only plausible point of contact between English speakers and Muans would have been the first bêche-de-mer station in the region, established by Charles Edwards on Albany Island in 1862 (Ganter, 1994: 19), where the lingua franca was almost certainly Pacific Pidgin English. However, it would have been worked mainly by Pacific Islanders, since the local Indigenous people were feared and, besides, Edwards left not long afterwards for Erub (Darnley Island). There was no government settlement in the area until Somerset was established in 1863, after which the Kaurareg visited fairly frequently (Kennett, 1868 in Moore, 1978: 238). The Muans may have learned some English from the Kaurareg, who were their close allies, and they were probably employed as swim divers for the pearling which began in Torres Strait in April 1870. I have found no record of a pearling station at Mua until 1872 but by mid-1871 Mua Pass had been 'fished with great success' (Chester, 1871), possibly from the end of the 1870 monsoon period, providing several months in which to pick up some (Pidgin) English from the mainly British pearlery and their Pacific Islander crews. The 1870 date also accords with the observation by the bishop that, judging by Namai's age in 1922, when he recounted the story, the battle had taken place 'about 50 years ago,' i.e., in c.1872 (*The Carpentarian*, 2 October 1922: 706).

If we therefore accept that the battle took place in 1870, is there enough internal evidence to specify the month? The original party from Mabuyag went fishing for turtle in the northwest season (*kuki*) – between December 1869 and March 1870 – not the expected *soeulal*, turtle mating season, between October and the end of November, when turtles are easiest to catch. The bad weather explains why the hunters had no luck even after a week of searching and why they were prevented from returning to Mabuyag. If there were approximately three to four months between the garden raid and the final battle – this according to Peter’s reckoning – it would place the time of the battle during the *sager* (southeast) time, June through August, the driest season of the year. This is also supported by the descriptions of the dust of battle flying up from the dry earth in such clouds that from a distance it appeared to be smoke. It also coincides with the most likely time of the boat crews’ visit to Mabuyag. We are not told the month of the visit but it must be after the *kuki* season, when pearling ceased due to the heavy rainfall and cloudy water, i.e., probably between May and August. The *Honolulu* was first reported wrecked in July 1870, which places the battle in the following month. Thus, all the evidence supports the hypothesis that the battle took place during *sager*, probably in August 1870.

### CONCLUSION

Of all the battles fought by the people of Mua, the most significant was their ‘last battle’, which has taken on iconic status for the Muan victims and the Badu and Mabuyag aggressors and continues to be retold. Superficially the story of a localised ‘private quarrel or wrong’ being ‘taken up and avenged by the community’ (Haddon, 1904: 277), it has with time become identified as a national defining discontinuity, a symbolic marker of the divide between pre-contact Torres Strait Islander life and the new, more peaceful era of Christianity and ‘civilisation.’ Some narrators make this explicit: Namai panders to Europeans’ fascination with cannibalism of his ancestors, symbolic of their lack of ‘civilisation’ and Isaac Charlie gently mocks his forebears’ ignorance of ‘civilised’ things, like flour, cows and rice, compared with their post-civilisation enlightenment. The battle is also historically important in that it provides a confirmation, context and explanation for some of the earliest recorded observations of Mua, notably its smaller-than-expected population, fear of strangers and abandonment of coastal villages. The 11 texts reproduced in this chapter,

transcribed between 1898 and 2002, shed light on the battle itself, its context, participants and outcomes. Equally important, they demonstrate how multiple, apparently unconnected fragments of documentary evidence can shed light on events which occurred in the years immediately preceding sustained European contact in Torres Strait.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Wilkin's (1904: 308) view was that narratives like the one under discussion were 'accounts of historical events, but it is not difficult to imagine how these could easily be transformed into hero-tales and so become folk-tales.'
- 2 We see a reflex of this in the desire of the Badu clan leaders to incorporate Pacific Islanders and their families who had settled on Badu from the 1870s.
- 3 According to Rivers' genealogies, Gib and Pedia were brothers, both being sons of Ngaragi and Dagum of the Dugong clan on Mabuyag.
- 4 Literally, 'You again eh? Again eh?'
- 5 There are many stories about the culture hero, Kuyam (also spelled Kuiaim, Kwoiam), whose killing spree reached from Cape York to the southern New Guinea coast. His cult centred on Mabuyag, where he died and is buried, but it served to link all the Western Islands (Haddon, 1904: 67-83, 110-111). Some say he came from the southern mainland to Mabuyag as a youth; others that he was born on Mabuyag and that it was his father who came from the mainland, travelling to Mabuyag via Nagi, Mua and Badu, and marrying a woman from Mabuyag, whose mother came from Muri (Mt Adolphus Island) (Lawrie, 1970: 101). He was a man of magic and ruthless in his pursuit of heads. He killed his mother and then journeyed through the islands into New Guinea, capturing heads. After his return to Mabuyag, the Badu men sought revenge but were always defeated. Finally the Muans joined with the Baduans and killed Kuyam's sister's brother. Kuyam's spearthrower broke and he climbed a hill to die. Kuyam had fashioned turtleshell into magical crescents (his personal *augadh*) to be worn as chest and back emblems. The Muau warriors did not take his head but they took back with them one of the emblems, Giribu, in order to acquire Kuyam's power and success in warfare.
- 6 Wilkin (1904: 311, footnote 2) notes that this may be a mistake, since it is the only mention of slings made to members of the expedition.
- 7 *Paiwa* is a sweet-scented tree, identified by Sidney Ray, linguist of the Cambridge Expedition, as *Ocimum canum*. Its bark was used in ritual practices connected with the *kod*, as well as in divination and wind-calling.
- 8 Here Wilkin (1904: 312) specifies that Bainu was 'grandfather of Peter who told me this tale'.
- 9 Kuyam's Aboriginal father is said to have abandoned his Mabuyag wife after her continual complaints about his preference for sleeping outside beside a fire rather than indoors on a mat in the island fashion (Lawrie, 1970: 89).
- 10 This is the hard wood called *thoelu* (bloodwood). Tabungnazi is located on the slopes of a hill in the southern part of Mua.
- 11 Wilkin has *sogéal* but, according to Rod Mitchell (pers. comm.), the correct form is *soegal*. It refers to the mourning fringe, two cross-chest bands worn like a cloak and made of frayed sago leaves, dyed red with a fringe in front and back.
- 12 According to Wilkin (1904: 315), the word used was 'Beretane', a Pacific Pidgin English word based on 'Britain' and used by the missionaries. This detail becomes important in dating the events more accurately (see below).
- 13 This is a reference to the fierce, shark-like Mabuyag warriors known as Zugutiam (Shark), literally 'reef creature' (Lawrie, 1970: 78). Zugu is a reef near Mabuyag.
- 14 The skull taken by Gizu at Adam that day was decorated with a *kaigas*, outlined in red; the space around was painted black and the rest of the skull was coloured red (see Haddon, 1904: 305, fig. 44.). When Gizu was aged about 15, he and a group of Mabuyag and Badu men took part in an earlier raid, although as a boy he was merely one of those looking after the canoes at Widui, while the adult warriors carried out the slaughter (Wilkin, 1904: 318).
- 15 Algida or Paipai (c.1854-1931) of Badu was one of the early London Missionary Society deacons, who later served for many years as principal churchwarden and councillor. His children were Maik William, Musu, Kila, Uiduldam and Marita. McMahon (1917: 445), who visited Badu in c.1916, wrote of 'this famous churchwarden', who 'keeps a sharp lookout, and with the silver topped ebony stick in hand – presented to him many years ago by a very distinguished Missioner, brings it down on the nodding head [of a churchgoer] with a rap that restores wakefulness to a superlative degree.' Algida, who belonged to the Cassowary, Dugong and Snake clans, was given his name, not because of his clan affiliation, but because of his 'rather generous mouth' (The Queenslander, 25 March 1937).
- 16 This was Stephen Davies, who served as bishop of Carpentaria from 21 April 1922 to 11 May 1929. He first visited the village of Poid on 23-24 July 1922 (Davies, 1922b); it was the successor to Adam and precursor to modern Kubin (see Shnukal, 'Historical Mua' chapter 4, this volume).
- 17 One may have been Kabara, 'chief of all Moa Island tribes' (C. O'Leary quoted in Lock, 1955: 180). O'Leary adds that Kabara 'died a hero's death at the hands of Wini and Kuyam, along with his warriors' during Mua's last fight, although Kuyam was almost certainly dead by then (if he in fact existed).
- 18 Beckett (1987: 59) writes that even after the colonisation of the Islanders 'fear of sorcery lingered.' In 1932 some of the crew of the Poid boat, *Manu*, were accused of practising sorcery (Macfarlane, 1932) and a few years later a man from Poid was removed to Palm Island on that account.
- 19 The captain is identified as Gib of Mabuyag.
- 20 I suspect that this is a typographical error and that Damu Pad is meant.
- 21 According to Steve Foster (pers. comm., 2001), 'Mua wiped out Badu. Mabuiaig came to help and together they wiped out Mua. Argan was given to the Mabuiaig people, because they helped wipe out Mua. This was around the time of Wini.'
- 22 There is now a general consensus that Anu Namai of Totalai, who became a churchwarden at Adam/Poid and the chief councillor, was the young boy who, with his mother, survived the attack and later returned to Totalai. However, Mauarie Eseli told Margaret Lawrie (n.d.) that the only Mualaig to survive the attack was Sibari, whom I cannot identify and may indeed be Anu Namai, although one would expect that fact to be stated. Moreover, different versions specify different numbers of survivors as well as none: 'There is a tradition that the last native inhabitant of Moa was killed by the men of Mabuiaig under a great wongai tree near where St Paul's Mission now stands' (ABM Review, August/October 1973: 25).

- 23 The place of the final battlefield is identified in the majority of stories as Adam and the victims as Italgai.
- 24 Pinney (1979) learned from Bertie Bootle Jardine, son of Frank Jardine, that Wini lost his life at Fly Point, under attack from Frank Jardine and his dogs.
- 25 According to Rod Mitchell, the *zangawa* is a small, longleafed variety of mangrove tree. With age it becomes hollow, and is called *aubub*.
- 26 Sagigi or Iwar, son of Doriki, mamoose of Badu, is estimated to have been born around 1860 at Badu and may have been too young to have fought with Mua. He died in 1941.
- 27 However, the Queensland Department of Heritage shipwreck database (<http://eied.deh.gov.au/nsd/public/welcome.cfm>) gives the date of the wreck of the *Antagonist* as 14 May 1862 and the place as Arlington Reef (Great Barrier Reef).
- 28 The date of the *Honolulu* wreck is given by the Queensland Department of Heritage shipwreck database (<http://eied.deh.gov.au/nsd/public/welcome.cfm>) as 27 June 1870 and the place as the North East Channel in Torres Strait.
- 29 It was also known as 'Wreck Reef' and 'Honolulu Reef' and was located by compass at roughly East half a mile, South one and a half miles distant from Saddle Island. Not only the *Honolulu* but also the British barque *Conqueror* had been wrecked on it (Jardine, 1872). Commander G.P. Heath (1872) of the Royal Navy described this 'dangerous sunken rock lying in the fairway of the Great North-east Channel' as being 'about 20 yards in diameter, with six feet of water over it at low water, and lying E. ½ S., 1½ miles from Saddle Island.'

